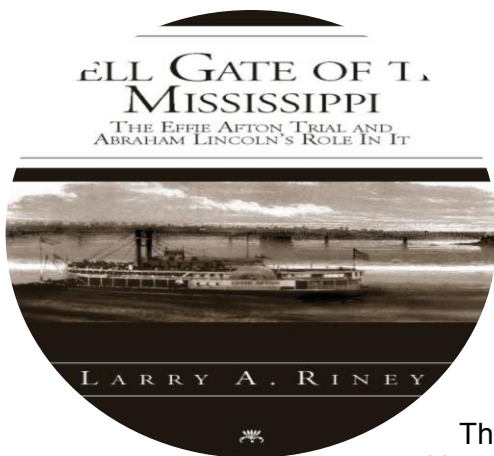


Lincoln Lives @ Your Library

The Rock Island Public Library



April 30, 2009

River vs. Rails!

“Lincoln Lives” Program Considers the Crash of the Effie Afton and Its Aftermath

To put the crash of the Effie Afton and its legal aftermath in perspective, consider this: What if the postal service had tried to limit the growth of the Internet in its earliest stages?

The Rock Island Library will mark Abraham Lincoln’s most important trial with a special program **at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6** at the Main Library, 401 19th Street, Rock Island. Part of the *Lincoln Lives @ your Library* series, “**Hellgate of the Mississippi**” will discuss Lincoln’s role in defending the railroad company after the steamboat *Effie Afton* crashed into a pier of the first bridge across the river at Rock Island on May 6, 1856.

Presenter Larry Riney, author of the book by the same name, will discuss Lincoln’s role in the Chicago-based trial of 1857. Along with the courtroom drama, Riney found evidence of backroom drama and double-dealing.

“My research gave me the opportunity to look closely at the legends and the facts surrounding the lawsuit,” explains Riney. “I gained a deeper appreciation of how the railroads and the bridge impacted the economic and social fabric of the river culture and the entire country before the Civil War. The Upper Mississippi River Valley, then known as the Far West, was a cauldron of unrest, economic and legal maneuvering, and one-upmanship.”

The Captain and owner of the boat, Jacob S. Hurd, sued the railroads for damages, in what became a complex court battle for the economic fate of an entire region. Captain Hurd’s lawsuit was funded by the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, while Lincoln helped defend the eastern railroad interests who owned the bridge. He was quick to realize that if the steamboat side won, the bridge would be torn down and the advance of the new and automated technology of the railroads would be stopped at the river’s edge. “In a larger sense, the trial became a major battle in the ongoing war between Chicago’s railroad internet and St. Louis’s steamboats that was fought throughout the 1850s,” says Riney.

As an extra, Riney will also lead an independent tour of related sites, including the Arsenal Museum that holds the steamboat bell and the site of the crash. Transportation for this optional event is on your own. Participants should plan to meet on the first floor of the Main Library at 2:30 p.m. on May 6. The tour is not sponsored by the library, but those who are interested may call 732-7303 for more information. There is no charge.

Riney is an award-winning freelance writer living in Geneseo, Illinois. *Hell Gate of the Mississippi* launched his new company, Talesman Press(R). Copies of the book will be available for sale by the author. The Lincoln Lives program is free and open to the public, and is sponsored by the Friends of the Rock Island Public Library.

Libraries offer plenty of print, online, visual and audio resources, many of which are free with a library card. For money-saving entertainment, enlightenment and enrichment for all ages, visit the Rock Island Main, 30/31 and Southwest Branch libraries, or check the Rock Island Library online at www.ripl.lib.il.us for details about library cards, services and free events for the family.

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